

Composting Kitchen Scraps

Composting your kitchen scraps not only creates high-quality compost but reduces waste at the same time.

There are two ways to compost kitchen scraps:

- ✂ Bury the kitchen scraps in your garden beds.
- ✂ Use a worm bin. Using redworms to compost kitchen waste makes high-quality compost from food scraps.

Care must be taken when composting kitchen scraps so as not to attract flies, rodents, and other pests.

Burying Method:

Burying is the simplest most low-tech method of composting waste from the kitchen.

Shred any large food pieces, then bury the material at least eight inches below the ground surface. The covered holes become usable garden space the following season.

This is a simple method, but because of the absence of air, some nutrients will be lost. Rodents, dogs, flies, and odor can become a problem with wastes buried less than six inches deep. Animals may dig up the material.

Worm Bin Method:

A worm bin is a sturdy box made of wood or plastic that has a tight-fitting lid to keep pests out, ventilation holes

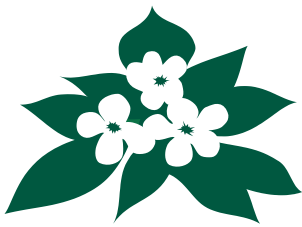
| Kitchen Scraps: | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Yes: | No: |
| Vegetable scraps | Meat |
| Grains and pasta | Fish and poultry |
| Fruit rinds and peels | Cheese |
| Breads and cereals | Oily foods |
| Coffee grounds and filters | Butter |
| Tea bags | Other animal products |
| Eggshells | |
| Paper napkins | |

to provide adequate air circulation, and drainage holes to control moisture levels.

To compost in a worm bin, you need these things:

- ✂ Worm bin
- ✂ Redworms, also known as red wigglers
- ✂ Bedding (pre-moistened shredded cardboard, non-waxy brown leaves or shredded newspaper)
- ✂ Kitchen scraps

For information about worm composting, check the Web site www.metrokc.gov/soils or refer to **Worms Eat My Garbage** by Mary Applehof for more information (available at some library branches ISBN 0-942256-10-7).



Be sure to visit our Web site at www.metrokc.gov/soils for more information on composting and waste reduction.

Call the King County Recycling and Composting Information Line at **206-296-4466**.
Toll free **1-800-324-6165**, ext.6-4466;
711(TTY Relay)

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What is Compost?


Compost is dark, crumbly, and earthy-smelling decomposed organic matter that has many beneficial uses. It is made from the decomposition of yard waste and kitchen scraps


The Value of Compost

- Compost enriches soil and improves plant growth. If you have a garden, lawn, trees, shrubs, or even planter boxes, you can make and use compost.
- By composting your yard waste and kitchen scraps, you reduce waste and help keep our environment healthy—naturally. Yard waste and kitchen scraps comprise approximately 28% of the average person’s garbage.
- Amending your garden soil with compost will make your soil healthier. Healthy soil provides many benefits to your plants and the environment.

**Healthy Soil acts like a:**

**Spigot:** it soaks up excess rainwater and slows runoff.

**Filter:** it traps urban pollutants like oil, metals and pesticides and filters the water that percolates through it.

**Supermarket:** it supplies valuable nutrients and antioxidants to plants.

Enriching your soil with compost will improve the health of your plants and help control air and water pollution, making King County a healthier place to live.

Composting Yard Waste

Compost Bin or Backyard Pile?

Compost happens because it is the natural product of the decomposition process. You can choose to compost in a pile or in a compost bin in your backyard...the results will be the same, you will get compost.

The decomposition process starts with bacteria that break down plant tissue. Then come the fungi and protozoans which further the process. That group is later joined by centipedes, millipedes, beetles, sow bugs and earthworms.

Using a Compost Bin for Yard Waste

Anything growing in your yard is potential food for the tiny decomposers. To begin, place the bin or pile where it is easily accessible to you, out of the direct sunlight, and close to your garden hose. Add annual weeds, grass clippings, leaves and remains from your garden as they are collected.

Chopping or shredding wastes, tossing together dry, brown materials with wet, green materials, and keeping the contents moist like a wrung out sponge, will speed the composting process.

| Yard Waste: | |
|---|--|
| Yes: | No: |
| GREENS (NITROGEN): <ul style="list-style-type: none">Grass clippingsGarden trimmingsFloral clippingsHouse plants and potting mix BROWNS (CARBON): <ul style="list-style-type: none">Twigs and stalksDeciduous leavesStrawCoarse untreated wood sawdust or shavings | Clippings recently treated with “weed & feed” or other herbicide DISEASED PLANTS TENACIOUS WEEDS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Morning gloryDandelions THORNY PLANTS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">RosesBlackberries EVERGREENS/WAXY COATED PLANTS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">IvyRhododendronsEvergreen needles and Laurel KITCHEN SCRAPS (USE A WORM BIN) PET FECES WEED SEEDS |

It can take from 6 months to 2 years to compost organic materials, so you only need to be patient, turn the pile occasionally and add water if it’s too dry.

Good Compost Ingredients

Anything growing in your yard is potential food for these the tiny decomposers. Carbon and nitrogen, from the cells of dead plants and microbes, fuel the decomposers’ activities. Generally, brown materials, such as fallen leaves and sawdust, are high in carbon, while green materials such as grass clippings and weeds are high in nitrogen. As you toss together the yard waste in your composting pile or bin, strive for a mix of 30 parts carbon to 1 part nitrogen for the ideal composting mixture.

What about weeds?

If you don’t want it in your finished compost –don’t put it in your compost bin or pile.

Now That It’s Done!
How Can I Use My Compost?

As a slow release fertilizer: Add to your flower and vegetable gardens, house plants and planter boxes.

As a mulch: Spread a layer around trees and shrubs to prevent soil erosion, suppress weeds and reduce the need to water.

As a lawn top dressing: Sprinkle a thin layer over your lawn spring and fall.

Don’t plant in pure compost; use it to amend and improve the soil.

How Much Compost Should I Use?

Measure your planting area or lawn and consult with a nursery professional to determine the quantity. Sandy soil may require more compost than clay soil.

| Yard Waste Compost Troubleshooting: | | |
|--|---|---|
| Symptoms: | Cause: | Solutions: |
| Smells like rotten eggs or garbage. | Pile is too wet. Food or pet waste in pile. | Turn pile and add leaves, straw, shredded newspaper. |
| Pile is dry inside. | Not enough water. Too much woody material. Pile is too small. | Turn and moisten pile. Mix in fresh greens. Chop or remove woody materials. |
| Pile is damp inside, but not composting. | Lack of greens. | Mix in fresh greens. Chop or remove excess woody material. |
| Pile has shrunk, but looks undecomposed. | Outside of pile is dry, but most of pile is probably composted. | Check in pile for finished compost. Use uncomposted material in next batch. |
| Clumps of slimy grass, ammonia smell. | Too much fresh grass. | Leave clippings on lawn, or mix in brown leaves and straw. |